

# ADVISORY COMMISSION ON COASTAL WATERS TOWN OF DARIEN

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Green's Ledge Light

January 6, 2015

Jeremy Ginsberg  
Planning and Zoning Director  
Darien Town Hall  
Darien, CT 06820

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for asking the Darien Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters for input on the Town's 2016 update of its Plan of Conservation and Development. We are sending this letter in an effort to give you our current thinking on issues relevant to our Commission, but would like to note that, given our meeting schedule and the holiday season, we've not had an opportunity to formally discuss these points with our whole Commission. As such, we may supplement these comments as the process unfolds.

In preparing these comments, we have reviewed the Town's 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development. Our comments here build upon the coastal-related recommendations included in that Plan.

We believe that the Town ought to consider the following coastal-related topics as it works towards completing its 2016 Plan of Conservation and Development:

- 1) **Water Quality.** The Town ought to have a focus on improving its water quality such that all Town waters are open to shellfishing (and suitable for swimming and other forms of recreation). Currently, the waters of Scotts Cove are closed to shellfishing, and there is no clear near-term prospect of them being opened. The source of the contamination is unclear and should be identified and rectified. To the extent that leaking septic fields are the source of the contamination, steps should be considered to prevent such leaks. Other possible sources of contamination include geese, lawn fertilizers and storm water drainage. Other waterways that should be included in this effort include Holly Pond, the Noroton River (which drains into Holly Pond) and Goodwives River.
- 2) **Pear Tree Point Beach.** Pear Tree Point Beach is obviously a tremendous coastal asset for the Town. The Town ought to develop a plan for the continued enhancement of Pear Tree Point Beach, not only in respect of the beach/swim area, but also in terms of the boat launch ramp. We are aware of concerns about the functionality of the current boat launch ramp. A process should be pursued to determine if those concerns are valid and, if so, what steps should be taken to rectify them. We have also seen reference in the 2006 Plan to the evaluation of whether some sort of fishing pier would be advantageous and think it makes sense to complete that evaluation

(as an aside and outside of the scope of our Commission, there is a suggestion that the “fishing dock” at Cherry Lawn Pond could be improved).

- 3) **Coastal Properties.** The Town should consider whether a policy to acquire additional coastal properties would make sense to increase the coastal access available to Darien residents. This would tie into Open Space considerations.
- 4) **Moorings.** We believe the Town ought to review what can be done to increase the number of available moorings and their effective utilization. Also, the 2006 Plan references a strategy of concentrating moorings in Darien Harbor (aka Noroton Harbor). The 2016 Plan should revisit if there should be limits on the number of moorings in the various Darien harbors. The 2006 Plan also references evaluating whether a breakwater would be desirable to increase the potential number of moorings and improve the protected nature of Darien Harbor (which is currently not very protected). We are not aware of whether such an evaluation has been completed but believe that at least a preliminary review makes sense. The 2016 Plan should also develop a strategy to protect our mooring fields from the types of conflict with holders of shellfish leases that is occurring in Greenwich right now.
- 5) **Funding of Coastal-Related Costs.** The 2016 Plan should review how different coastal-related costs are currently funded and evaluate the best funding options going forward. Currently, the mid-channel markers, no-wake buoys and rock hazard buoys are each funded separately, with the mid-channel markers on the Harbormaster’s budget, the no-wake buoys on the Police Department budget and the rock hazard buoys being paid for by a coalition of the Noroton Yacht Club, the Darien Boat Club and the Darien Power Squadron. It is not clear that having so many different funding sources is optimal or that the private funding of the rock hazard buoys will continue long-term. Further, monitoring the harbors dredged depth will require funding as well as any potential actual dredging that is needed in the future. It may make sense to develop a more consistent funding scheme going forward.
- 6) **Harbor Channel Depth.** The Town should implement a system to periodically and professionally monitor the Harbor Channel Depth so that future dredging needs can be evaluated based on data and not anecdotes.
- 7) **Commercial Shellfish Leases.** The 2016 Plan should identify as a priority a comprehensive cataloguing of the Town’s commercial shellfish leases. Our understanding is that a large degree of uncertainty exists as to the exact counterparties and terms of the commercial shellfish leases currently outstanding. As a step to reduce potential conflict and uncertainty going forward, the Town ought to make sure it understands the terms of each of these leases, with special priority given to leases that overlap the various Town mooring fields.
- 8) **Buoy Markers.** The Town should create a plan to identify all navigation hazards in our harbors for the protection of the boating public and evaluate a strategy for marking the more significant hazards.
- 9) **Coastal View Assets.** The 2006 Plan recommended the creation of an inventory of the Town’s coastal view assets so that steps could be taken to preserve them in the future. We are not aware that such an inventory has been created but feel that an inventory of these assets is a good idea and would be happy to assist in its creation.

We look forward to working with you on these issues as the process moves forward and plan attend the meeting on January 13. In the interim, please feel free to contact us with any comments or questions.

Flip Huffard  
Chairman  
Darien Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters

Cc: Members of the Darien Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters